

What Is Claimed Is:

1. A method of facilitating e-commerce transactions for products or services related to content in a transmitted stream of content comprising the steps of:

obtaining said content, said content comprising a plurality of content blocks; generating metadata relating to corresponding ones of said content blocks, said metadata allowing a user interface on a user device configured to receive said stream of content to indicate to a user that related said products or services are available;

adding said metadata to said stream of content;

initiating a transaction with a server in response to user selection of one of said products or services via said user device, said server being configured to initiate transactions with suppliers connected to said server to obtain transaction data relating to said selected one of said products or services, said transaction data comprising at least names of said suppliers, and quotes for said selected one of said products or services; and

providing said transaction data to said user device via said server.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

receiving said stream of content at said user device;

generating a user input via said user device at a selected time during reception of said stream of content; and

generating an indication via said user interface of said products or services associated with said content blocks being received at said selected time using said metadata corresponding thereto.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2, wherein said metadata corresponding to said content blocks being received at said selected time comprises specialized metadata to enable at least one of brokerage and bidding operations to locate at least one of said suppliers of the related said products or services, and e-commerce transactions with said at least one of suppliers to purchase said related said products or services.

4. A method as claimed in claim 2, wherein said initiating step comprises the step of locating a supplier of said products or services associated with said content being received at said selected time.

5. A method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

selecting one of said suppliers indicated in said transaction data using said user device ; and

prompting said user for approval of initiating a transaction with the selected one of said suppliers.

6. A method as claimed in claim 5, further comprising the steps of:

completing a transaction with said selected one of said suppliers to obtain said selected one of said products or services; and

billing said user for said selected one of said products or services;

7. A method as claimed in claim 6, further comprising the step of transferring a selected percentage of said transaction to an entity responsible for performing said step of obtaining said content.

8. A method as claimed in claim 5, comprising the steps of:

completing a transaction with said selected one of said suppliers to obtain said selected one of said products or services; and

transferring a selected percentage of said value of said transaction to at least one of a broadcast station transmitting said content, a communication path provider operating a communication path on which said content was transmitted, at least one of said suppliers, and an entity which generates at least one of said metadata, said content and said stream of content.

9. A method of selectively substituting content into content streams for transmission to one or more users comprising the steps of:

generating a broadcast data stream comprising a plurality of content blocks and at least one floating reference content block, each of said content blocks comprising content, said floating reference being an empty block having metadata;

transmitting said broadcast data stream;

selecting content to be provided in said broadcast data stream via said floating reference content block by comparing and determining an optimal match between at least two criteria selected from the group consisting of a profile of a broadcast station from which said broadcast data stream is transmitted, a profile of an advertisement spot in said broadcast data stream corresponding to said floating reference content block, a

profile of a user group comprising a plurality of said users, a profile of one of said users, a profile of said broadcast data stream, and profiles of content available for substitution into said broadcast data stream; and

creating a reference content block comprising at least one of selected content and a reference with which to obtain said selected content from a storage location, said selected content corresponding to said optimal match, said reference content block being used in said broadcast data stream in lieu of said floating reference content block.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9, wherein said creating step comprises the step of configuring selected said content blocks to refer to different said content blocks depending on which of said users said selected content blocks are intended for.

11. A method as claimed in claim 9, wherein a broadcast station transmits said broadcast data stream and further comprising the step of:

specifying metadata associated with said content blocks in said broadcast data stream to define which portions of said broadcast data stream are intended for different types of said users;

wherein said selecting step comprises the step of determining said optimal match using said metadata.

12. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least one server provides said users with said broadcast data stream and access to content from different content sources, and communicates with at least one e-commerce provider, said content available for substitution into said broadcast data stream relating to said at least one e-commerce provider, said at least one server being operable to determine said optimal match.

13. A method as claimed in claim 12, wherein said at least one server is further operable to locate said selected content satisfying said optimal match using said reference a selected period of time after the corresponding said reference content block is transmitted from said server, and to open said selected content for access via at least one of said users.

14. A method as claimed in claim 12, wherein a tuner operated by at least one of said users receives said broadcast data stream, said tuner being operable in response to said

reference to look up said selected content specified thereby for substitution into the received said broadcast data stream.

15. A method as claimed in claim 14, further comprising the step of operating said tuner to switch to said selected content.

16. A method as claimed in claim 15, further comprising the step of counting the number of said users who request access to each of said selected content.

17. A method as claimed in claim 16, further comprising the step of obtaining payment from said at least one e-commerce provider in accordance with said number of said users determined to have look up said selected content.

18. A method as claimed in claim 9, comprising the steps of:
determining the number of users receiving said selected content; and
deducting an account corresponding to each provider of said selected content in accordance with said number of users.

19. A method as claimed in claim 18, further comprising the step of transferring at least a portion of said deducted amount to at least one of said broadcast station transmitting said broadcast data stream comprising said selected content, a communication path provider operating a communication path on which said selected content was transmitted, and an entity which generates at least one of said metadata, said content and said broadcast data stream.

20. A communication network for providing users with means to purchase products or services related to content in a stream of content comprising:

a network comprising at least one station for providing said content on at least one transmission path to a plurality of user devices connected to said network;

at least one content provider for providing said content, said at least one station being operable to format said content for transmission via said network;

a metadata provider for providing said stream of content with metadata that allows said users to initiate transactions to obtain at least one of selected said content and

said products or services related to selected said content, said metadata provider being one of said at least one content provider and another information provider;

at least one distribution router connected to said at least one content provider and to said users and operable to allow different said content to be requested by said users and accessed; and

a least one user device connected to said distribution router and operable to receive said stream of content, said distribution router maintaining data relating to said user devices connected thereto, said at least one user device being operable to use said metadata in said broadcast content stream to select from among different streams of content and to initiate transactions related to the selected said content, said content being formatted in said stream of content in content blocks, said metadata being associated with respective content blocks, said stream of content further comprising reference content blocks comprising metadata that refers to at least one of said content blocks and another one of said reference content blocks, wherein metadata in said reference content blocks can override metadata associated with said content blocks that have been referred to by said reference content blocks, said distribution router being programmable to resolve which of said metadata in said reference content blocks and said content blocks which have been referred to is to be used.

21. A communication network as claimed in claim 20, further comprising a market server connected to providers for said products or servers and to at least one of said distribution router and said user device, and operable to perform a transaction to purchase said selected content and said products or services associated with said selected content.

22. A communications network as claimed in claim 20, wherein said stream of content comprises floating reference content blocks being initially generated with no content therein, said broadcast station being operable to configure how said floating reference content blocks are to be used, and further comprising a market server connected to providers for said products or servers and to at least one of said distribution router and said user device, and operable maintain profiles of said users, and at least one of said floating reference content blocks, said broadcast station, substitute content available from said providers, and said providers, said marker server using said

profiles to dynamically select said substitute content to replace said floating reference content blocks.

23. A communication system for providing users with a stream of content comprising content and floating reference content blocks being initially generated with no content therein, said communication system comprising a market server connected to providers for products or servers that can be requested and purchased via said stream of content and operable maintain profiles of said users, and at least one of said floating reference content blocks, a broadcast station for said stream of content, substitute content available from said providers, and said providers, said marker server using said profiles to dynamically select said substitute content to replace said floating reference content blocks.